Shrinathji’s Peethika

Shrinathji’s Peethika is a rectangular framework. The idol of Shrinathji is enclosed in an arch within this framework. The 9 symbols embedded against five basic elements are woven intricately in the background of this Peethika. Shrinathji stands at the base of it. They show us how we can strike a beautiful balance between our mind and heart, attachment and detachment and learn to live like hermits while playing the role of householders.

The elements in the background

The background of the Peethika represents the rocky terrain of mount Goverdhan. The waters of the Yamuna flow over it. Chandravali and Radha reside on the top right and left corners of the Peethika and two Kumarikas stand in prayer near Shrinathji’s feet.

The nine symbols

A cow and a bull stand by Shrinathji’s right foot. A serpent with an open hood is placed near his thigh. A ram faces Shrinathji’s right shoulder and a rishi is seated to the right of his head. An icon of a parrot eating a fruit is embedded right above his head.

A pair of peacocks look up to him as they stand near Shrinathji’s left foot. A lion’s face is embedded next to his left thigh. A coiled serpent faces his left shoulder. Two rishis are seated on the left side of his head.

Prithvi and Dharma

The cow represents Prithvi, mother Earth, who gives without expecting anything in return. Yet, we human beings milk her dry. We take her gifts for granted. When her udders are sore, she asks Vishnu for justice. Vishnu incarnates as Krishna and gives Prithvi her due by soaking her with the blood of ruthless kings. The war of Mahabharata was waged for this very reason.

The bull Dharma stands on four legs: austerity, cleanliness, mercy and truthfulness. Dharma loses his first leg of austerity in the Satya- Yuga, the second leg of cleanliness in the Treta – Yuga, the third leg of mercy in the Dwapar – Yuga. We live in the Kali Yuga where the bull stands on the lone leg of truthfulness.

Sesha

The serpent with the open hood is Ananta Sesha – Nag the serpent on which Vishnu reclines on the ocean of milk, the Kshirasagara. Sesha represents Time. When Sesha uncoils time moves forward, there is creation and progress, but when he coils back, the entire universe collapses.

Agni’s Vahan, the Ram

Agni, the fire god purifies but destroys too. His Vahan, the ram symbolizes determination, power, fearlessness and protection.

Dharma

The lone rishi on the top right corner signifies Dharma.

A pair of peacocks

Peacocks are showy birds with beautiful long tail feathers. They have a shrill cry, strut around proudly and adore all the attention that they get from the females. In Shrinathji's Peethika however, their plumes are folded.

Nara- Simha

Nara-Simha, the half-lion- half-man avatar of Vishnu is ferocious and resorts to ruthless violence when he is goaded by people who misuse his blessings. Nara-Simha can be calmed down only by an equally powerful entity - Shiva who is renowned for his detachment.

Vasuki

Vasuki is the king of snakes, the Nagas. Yet he agrees to become the churning rope during the Samudra Manthan. He spews out Halahal, the deadly poison first but eventually blesses the devas and the asuras with several invaluable gifts and Amrit, the pot of nectar too.

Artha and Kama

The two rishis on the top left corner of the Peethika represent Artha, material reality and Kama, love.

The parrot above Shrinathji's head

The parrot above Shrinathji's head represents Shukhdev, the son of Ved Vyas who narrates the Shrimad Bhagavad to Parikshit and helps him understand the essence of God in seven days.

Significance of the background

The mount of Goverdhan represents stillness and eternal faith. The Yamuna represents bhakti. Bhakti flows into our souls when we are calm, composed and expect nothing from anyone, like the mount of Goverdhan.

If Radha and Krishna symbolize unconditional love, it is Chandravali who brings them together. Some say that Chandravali is another aspect of Radha. But most believe that the flute of Krishna, Vamshi, is none other than Chandravali Devi.

Radha comes running to Krishna whenever he plays his flute. Krishna never plays the flute after leaving Radha. The flute, Chandravali, is therefore instrumental in bringing us closer to the lord.

The two Kumarikas, avatars of Durga, represent the Shakti which lies dormant within us. It gives us the strength to ward off negative forces.

Steadfastness in Bhakti gives us Shakti to love unconditionally like Radha. Like Chandravali, we are mere instruments in the lord's hands. We should be grateful to be so close to the lord.

Significance of the symbols on Shrinathji's right

Dharma is emphasized upon twice on the right side. Prithvi believes in selfless service but forgets it her Dharma to be true to herself too. Perhaps we understand our Dharma, our prime duty is to take care of ourselves first, only when others take us for granted.

Sesha, Time can teach us many things. Ups and downs are a part of all our lives. We create and progress when we succeed but our entire universe collapses when we experience failure. Fire, Agni, helps us at such times. It destroys our negative tendencies, cleanses our thoughts/emotions and purifies our souls. Like the ram, we learn to move ahead with determination and complete faith in the Lord and ourselves.

Walking on the path of Dharma is often a solo inner journey. Not many may accompany or understand us. But like the lone rishi, we know we are walking on the path of Dharma and often that thought alone empowers us.

Significance of the symbols on Shrinathji's left

If we know, believe and understand God, pride will find no place in our minds. Like the twin peacocks, we will associate with people who puncture our ego and keep us grounded.

Yet, in being human, we tend to get carried away by the euphoria of name, fame, beauty, money etc. That is when Nara-Simha descends into our lives. He puts us through bitter experiences and whips all the vanity out of our fragile egos. Only detachment (Shiva) can help us cope with Nara-Simha's wrath.

Nara-Simha's wrath can turn us into bitter human beings. Initially like Vasuki, we will spew out Halahal, the deadly poison. We feel as if we are trapped between the good and evil forces in our life. But eventually, like Vasuki, we will stop trying to understand the ways of Krishna and just surrender to him with complete faith.

We do our best to detach ourselves from the external world but are unable to. It is our Dharma to live through our lives, to nourish and

sustain ourselves. We do have to earn a living, Artha. So we continue to do so. But now Artha does not mean only material wealth to us. We pursue a loftier goal and yearn to find some meaning and purpose, Artha, in life. There is more empathy, more room for love, Kama, in our hearts now.

The parrot headed Shukdev eating a fruit conveys the most beautiful message of all to us. We dip into the essence of Shrimad Bhagavad and try to understand the essence of God. We can sense the transformation within us – we have a little more control over ourselves. Our 'Chit' is more anchored. The 'Sat' within us prevails more often. When we experience 'Ananda', we appreciate it.

- We fast, feast, dress up according to the weather/our moods and love to enjoy all the facets of our lives.
- Similarly, in Pushti Marg, the path of grace, all forms of Krishna, including the idol of Shrinathji are offered a variety of food and adorned according to the weather. The ambience around the idol too keeps changing because Krishna enjoys all the facets of life with élan!
- In keeping with this principle, Shrinathji's Peethika is left uncovered during summers, and is completely covered during winters.